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ABSTRACT

Although the humanistic and democratic practices in the Czech Republic secondary schools are currently insufficient due to the communist regime prior to 1989, a tradition exists in the Czech cultural background for humanity and democracy in education, and those values can be incorporated into the school environment again. The long term isolation of Czechoslovakia from the developments in the social sciences that have taken place in the west since 1939 has resulted in an aversion to modern social sciences. Czech participants in discussions on the content of civic education agree that the central aim of civic education is to provide students the skills for individual responsibility and social participation. The goal of social science teaching that developed from participant discussions is to provide pupils with an understanding of the principles of a democratic society and to identify the fundamental values of a democracy. Extracurricular activities based in the civics curriculum help the students to think critically, listen with discernment, and communicate with power and precision. Education for citizenship means to enable students to make connections between what they learn and how they live. (Author/CK)

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(Aims and Outlooks)

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THE CHARACTER OF THE CZECH SECONDARY SCHOOL: ASPECTS UP HUMANITY AND DEMOCRACY IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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HUMANISTIC AND DEMOCRATIC GOALS IN THE CZECH SECONDARY SCHOOL (Aims and Outlooks)

I. Traditional background

There are many problems to be solved in the Czech secondary school today. One of them is the insufficiency of humanistic and democratic practices. In this respect,an inheritance from the old regime still retains a negative influence. Teachers, Students, and even scholars have never suspected this influence to have been so strong and hard. This is very surprising, since the tradition of humanity and democracy in our education are very established in and coherent with our historical cultural background. In order to explain the present position of education as regards humanity and democracy in our country it is important

to make reference to our oldest traditions since the 15th century which culminated in the pedagogical achievements of Comenius and in the theoretical and political movment for a democratic school at the end of last century.

In the period between World Var I. and World Var II. the result of this evolution was the "Gymnasium" (lycée) a democratic school with a great value placed on teaching humanities. Vith the exeption of the theoretical trends of that time, the achievements ideas of humanity and democracy were strongest in Gymnasium. The formal model of this type of school was very traditional. The span of education was eight grades, student s ages rangins from 10 - 18. Boy s and girl s schools were separated. Classical subjects, humanities, and mathematics were very important in the curriculum, just as in the second part of the 19th century. Although the curriculum treasured the best traditions of the humanistic and democratic very modern and progressive ideas of European and American pedagogical theory were also implemented.

A testimony of the quality of humanities and civic education in the gymnasium of the time is the number of persons executed for the resistance against Nazism in the time of World Var II.: 25% were from the educated class, though this class was only 5% of the entire of population. And the ratio was similar in the case of resistance against the Communist regime. These facts illustrate the great prestige of humanistic and democratic tradition of the gymnasium. This is the reason for the effort to reimplement these humanistic and democratic ideas of the gymnasium appeared immediately after the 1989 revolution.

II.Probing and questioning after 1989

The first problem to solve after 1989 was the awareness that it was impossible to reactivate the curriculum of the traditional

gymnasium since it corresponded to the necessities of society more than fifty years ago and thus it is not very useful for young people today. Another serious problem which appeared was the realization that the reconstruction of the eight grades of high school does not automatically bring the education to humanity and democracy.

And thirdly we realized the importance of the correspondence between our national curriculum and that of other European countries. Very established tradition in education for democracy and humanity is characteristic for our country but on the other hand Czechoslovakia has been prevented from following the developments in Social Sciences that have taken place on the Vest since 1939, except during short periods in 1945 - 1948 and 1967 - 1970. This long - term isolation has created many problems in the discussions concerning the aims, content and form of civic education.

These problems were solved in the gymnasium formed by the communist educational policy in the last decades. Originally the gymnasium was the school of great humanistic dimensions. During the last decades the classical humanistic subjects, arts and modern social sciences corresponding to civic education were excluded from the curriculum and the relics were deformed by Marxist - Leninist version of social science. It is possible to say, that these subjects did not exist in last decades as a matter of fact.At the same time the prestige and the position of sciences in the curriculum was great. Humanistic subjects, especially civic education, had no prestige and they were tought very few lessons. For example in the fourth year gymnasium there are two lessons in history weekly in the first, second and third grade. Civic education is taughtalso two times per week but only in the third and fourth grades. Some students have an optional subject seminar in social science in the third and fourth year.

All these circumstances are connected with the teacher s

education and with the problem of further education. In this situation a discussion about the form of the subject was resolveded with decision to promote the curricular form of civic education first.

Extracurricular activities would be developed from the curricular form. Although the most progressive theories prefer extracurricular form for civic education, this actual model does not correspond to the present - day teachers abilities and, moreover it is not coherent with our traditional models.

Our pedagogical ideas from the period 1920 - 1939 strongly influenced all discussions about the content of civic education. All teachers, scholars and other participants in this discussion considered traditional humanistic subject as psychology, logic, and philosophy imdispensable. The popularity of these subjects was based on the short period of freedom in 1967 - 1970, when these disciplines were an important part of the curriculum for civic education. In opposition to the popularity of these subjects there was a strong aversion against any science concerning politics, society, economy, and related subjects. In short there was an aversion against modern social sciences altogether.

But the result was highly favorable. All participants of these discussions have agreed that the central aim of civic education is to provide the pupils skill of the individual responsibility, and responsible social participation including, the ability to modify their own behavior according to their own moral principles. In this relation, the content of these courses included psychology, the social sciences, logic, and philosophy. The assignment of psychology is helping pupils to understand themselves and to solve their problems. The goal of social science teaching is to provide pupils with an understanding of the principles of the democratic society and to identify the fundamental values of democracy. Philosophy and logic are to help

them discover correct ways of living and thinking.

In this initial period of seeking an adequate character of civic education, limitation to civic alone was undeniable. The reasons included not only the popularity of our tradition, but more so was desire to the negative influence of the communist regime, one which still persists in our society.A total absence of common moral values is crucial here. The problem is not only concerned with the values of citizenship and democracy, but with holistic life of society and the individual personality. That why the focus of this subject is values education.

The development of this goal was not easy. At first the teachers and scholars chose same particular values as aims, such as home, love, friendship, family etc. These values were presented mainly on the background of philosophical knowledge. The social science teaching was not as successful from the point of view of values education. The knowledge were emphasized regarding to the practical and pragmatic reasons. In the society of today participants must have the ability to behave socially and this pragmatic goal has overshadowed the emancipatory goals self-determination and the major task of education, to respect the goal to behave socially. The search for the goal of the subject civic education was realized in a very extensive frame. It is connected with our tradition and with the demands of today. Of permanent importance is the guiding of pupils towards the ability to weigh information and to give a personal standpoint which is partly based on an allocation of priorities to values.

Crucial to this process is to give pupils a chance to recognize values, to distinguish between the individual, social and philosophical dimensions and to analyze how chaotically people actually use value concept. To pay systematic attention to philosophical notions is specific for us. The pupils have already to a large extent been informed about the nature and characteristics of the values issue.So that they would be able to

validate their personal preference and points of view on the basis of philosophical notions.

These philosophical notions are of crucial importance for the eventual weighing of values and therefore, in principle, deserve attention in all subject areas. The possibility to cross the boundaries of individual subjects and to develop extracurricural activities is founded here.

III. Education for democracy

It is possible to develop civic education in the frame of common human values education. At the heart of any civic education in a democratic society is the goal of promoting responsible participation in political and community affairs. Effective citizenship requires an individual understanding of the value of human rights, in order that citizens protect them against those prepared to take them away. Responsible citizenship requires an individual understanding of duties and the limitation of rights, so that the rights of others are respected and the survival of democratic system is assured.

Democracy provides the possibility to practice political rights individually and collectively. Citizens in emerging democracies must understand the value of the opportunities for participation in democratic systems. The level and type of participation is varied, but there is no question that a minimal level of political involvment of all citizens is required to maintain democracy. In newly emerging societies, the ability of non-democratic groups to mobilize a great number of people towards destructive political activities, exist so the aim of civic education has to focus on political responsibility and the respect for the rights of others. Civic education must provide the opportunity to practice rights and responsibilities and to

combine them into a balanced whole.

Students have to be able to identify and explain the importance of the political rights guaranteed by the constitution, to develop and defend a list of responsibilities of a good citizen in democracy, to list and discuss a variety of ways in which citizens may become active in the life of their communities, to identify and explain the importance of political participation in a democracy,and to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate forms of participation in a democratic society. It is possible to promote the main aim of civics education:the guidance of pupils to identify and explain what attitudes and values help support a democratic way of life.

IV. Central aims and outlooks

Civic education in our country is concerned with common human values including the values of democracy and citizenship. It may influence the environment in school. And it is possible to base extracurricural activities in civics curriculum. Extracurricural activities help the student to think critically, listen with discernment and communicate with power and precision. All forms of civic education must provide students with basic knowledge about social issues and institutions, to allow them to put their understanding of democracy in perspective and their citizenship should be demonstrated in every institution in which the student is involved, especially at school. Education for citizenship means helping students make connections between they learn and how they live.